

VZCZCXYZ0012
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHAM #3177 2071418
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 261418Z JUL 07
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9651
INFO RUEHDO/DEPT OF INTERIOR WASHDC
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 5309
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3289
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0684
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 4547
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 3649
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 1803
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH 0771

UNCLAS AMMAN 003177

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ELA AND NEA/RA - LAWSON
STATE FOR OES/PCI - SALZBERG AND BLAINE
STATE PASS USAID
USAID FOR MILLER AND DEELY AND ANE
CAIRO FOR USAID - BARTH
CAIRO FOR AGCONUS KURZ

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: SENV EAID PGOV EAGR JO

SUBJECT: HUNDREDS ILL FROM NONFATAL, WATERBORNE PARASITE IN MAFRAQ;
RUMORS ABOUND OF MINISTERIAL RESIGNATIONS

Sensitive but unclassified. Protect accordingly.

¶1. (U) Summary: Approximately 900 residents in Jordan's northern Mafraq Governorate were recently infected by a nonfatal parasite found in their water tanks. Prime Minister Bakhit formed a committee headed by Minister of Health Kharabsheh to investigate the causes of the diarrhea and high fever that sent so many to local hospitals in recent weeks. The GOJ determined that a worn out water supply network was at fault, and ordered its immediate replacement. Critics blame the Water and Health Ministers for poor preventative maintenance and a slow reaction to the crisis. Rumors abound that both may resign. End Summary.

¶2. (U) In the past two weeks, approximately 900 people from two villages in the Mafraq Governorate in northeastern Jordan suffered from acute diarrhea and high fevers following the contamination of their water tanks. According to a report prepared by an investigative team established by Prime Minister Marouf Bakhit and comprising researchers from the Royal Scientific Society, the Jordan University for Science and Technology, and the Amman-based WHO Center for Environment Activities, lab tests revealed the presence of the nonfatal parasite cryptosporidium. This parasite, first discovered in the late 1970's, infects humans and a wide range of domestic and wild animals. Health Minister Saad Kharabsheh told English daily The Jordan Times that the cryptosporidium contamination resulted from a "faulty 8-inch water pipe feeding households in the Mafraq area [that] led to the formation of a pond that was later contaminated by animal dung."

¶3. (U) PM Bakhit instructed the Ministry of Water and Irrigation to examine the different options available to sterilize the water and to ensure that it is free from any harmful bacteria. Replacement of the water supply network had been delayed due to a lack of funding. PM Bakhit called for its immediate replacement which will cost approximately 1 million JD (\$1.41M). Note: USAID is supporting a contract for local engineering firm Engicon to conduct a detailed design, tendering process, and environmental assessment that will result in a significant upgrade, including new filtering system and storage tanks for the Mafraq Wastewater Treatment Plant. This contract is scheduled to last nine months. The construction will be under a Host Country Contract with 85% USAID funding; the total USAID budget for the project is \$8 million. Construction should

last about 15 months. The improved wastewater treatment plant would not have prevented the cryptosporidium infection that occurred. End Note.

¶4. (U) Residents of the infected areas continue to question both the cause of the problem and the proposed solution. They remain skeptical that the contamination came from a potable water source. They also claim that the numbers of cases exceed the figures announced by the GOJ.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: The GOJ's performance in reaction to this crisis has not been judged favorably, particularly by Mafraq residents. Officials are clearly sensitive to public sentiment, and PM Bakhit traveled to the affected area on July 17, taking with him Water Minister Zafer Al Alem who cut short a meeting with visiting NEA Senior Advisor for Science and Technology Lawson. Rumors abound that both the Health and Water Ministers might resign, which could also lead to a larger government reshuffle. When asked for his views on the current debacle, former Minister of Water and Irrigation Hatem Halawani commented to EconCouns that incidents of contamination were common and occurred worldwide. He did not consider the Mafraq incident to be indicative of larger problems. When asked why the issue continued to dominate the press, he lamented that Jordanians love conspiracy theories and said the water minister always presents an easy target. End Comment.

Visit Amman's Classified Website at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/amman>

HALE